

U.S. aid sought in Runyon

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Vas says DEP isn't up to the project

Perth Amboy Mayor Joseph Vas yesterday called for federal intervention in the cleanup of Runyon Watershed — the city's polluted drinking water source — saying the state Department of Environmental Protection is not up to the long-term project.

"I believe that the scope of contamination at Runyon is beyond what the DEP and the state of New Jersey can really do," Vas declared, following a three-hour meet-

ing with DEP officials yesterday.

"We need to move to the federal level, the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] for the complete cleanup of Runyon."

Vas also disclosed that the city has developed emergency plans should two tainted drinking wells be forced to shut down. One option is to buy a million gallons a day from Middlesex Water Co. of Woodbridge.

Meanwhile, several other key developments regarding Runyon and news of spreading chemical and metal contamination at two primary drinking wells were disclosed yesterday:

■ The city and the DEP agreed to "minimize" the use of contaminated Well No. 6, where a plume of dangerous chlorobenzene, a cancer-causing agent is spreading at the well site.

However, no decision has been made

cleanup

whether to shut the well entirely.

The city is less concerned about the apparent increase in zinc contamination at Well No. 5, city officials said.

Vas said city and DEP personnel will meet in September to discuss whether the contaminated wells should be closed.

City officials have stressed that treated water delivered to 40,000 Perth Amboyans is safe and meets state standards.

■ The DEP, for the first time, has ordered a study at Runyon, a 1,260-acre

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city-owned tract in Old Bridge, to determine the extent of contamination and evaluate cleanup plans.

The DEP directed the study be conducted by two Old Bridge firms, CPS Chemical Co. and Madison Industries Inc., who courts have held responsible for polluting the watershed.

Perth Amboy environmental attorney Joseph Maraziti said the study, known as a Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study, or RI/FS is the type ordered by the EPA when studying Superfund sites.

■ Vas said the city has developed two contingency plans should the two polluted wells — No. 5 and No. 6 — be forced to shut permanently.

Vas said the city has asked the DEP to move speedily to approve permits for an experimental collector well that could provide up to 4 million gallons of drinking water per day. The city needs about 5.6 million gallons daily.

Wells 5 and 6 together provide about 2.2 million gallons a day.

"When the permits are in place, we will be able to basically be able to replace the water from Wells 5 and 6, and shut them down if need be," Vas said.

"We asked for the state's cooperation," to process the necessary permits to operate the so-called Ranney well quickly. "They told us that they would," Vas said.

However, should the wells be forced to shut down before the permits are approved, the city would buy water from Middlesex

Water Co., which operates a treatment plant in Edison.

"The city will continue discussions with Middlesex Water Company about a contingency plan to purchase up to one million gallons per day, in case of an emergency situation with the production levels of any drinking wells at the Runyon Watershed," Vas said.

Vas said his call for federal help at Runyon stems from the long-term multimillion-dollar cleanup of the watershed.

Runyon provides the drinking water for Perth Amboy, which sells drinking water commercially to South Amboy.

Maraziti said he believed the Runyon Watershed should be treated and cleaned as a federal Superfund site, since it is being

polluted by a Superfund site — the CPS/Madison site, ranked as number 11 on the (Superfund) National Priorities List of contaminated sites.

"The runoff from Madison and CPS is affecting Runyon, so this is a Superfund cleanup," Maraziti explained. "They [Superfund cleanups] are extremely expensive and I don't think its surprising to acknowledge that resources to clean Runyon are beyond the scope of New Jersey.

"The full impact of the Superfund program is certainly warranted here and is long overdue."

Vas said the city will continue to closely monitor the water testing results at both wells on a weekly basis.

Vas said he expects a decision on whether to continue to operate Wells 5 and 6 should be made after the next meeting with the DEP in mid-September.

At that time, technicians are expected to recommend an intermediate solution to protecting the two wells from further contamination.

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